Rapcon controllers find home away from home

By SSgt. Scott Davis
Public affairs

Shifting the RAF Lakenheath radar approach control facility to another Royal Air Force station has led to a significant savings for the base, and the transition went unnoticed to RAPCON customers.

The new equipment at the RAPCON forced its move to RAF Honington in January. Typically, the base would have spent $750,000 to bring in a mobile RAPCON for temporary use, according to CMSgt. Eugene Newton, 48th Operations Support Squadron, chief controller, RAPCON.

"It was cheaper to rent from the RAF," Newton said.

It's the second time the air traffic controllers have operated from RAF Honington. During the summer of 1995, Lakenheath's runway underwent construction and flightline operations were moved to Honington.

RAPCON controllers provide air traffic control guidance to military and civilian aircraft within 40 miles of Lakenheath. The switch to Honington in January went smoothly, according to Newton.

"The pilots hardly noticed that we were operating from a different location."

The controllers are expected to renew operations at Lakenheath the first week of May when installation of the new equipment is complete. The Lakenheath RAPCON is improving its radar and communications equipment, which will include an increase in the current number of radio frequencies used.

Photo by SSgt. Scott Davis

Air traffic controllers Amn. Diane Crowther and SSgt. James Spillane handle military and civilian aircraft from the temporary radar approach control facility at RAF Honington.

"The new equipment will allow us to distribute our workload across more controllers, allowing better service to the pilots," Newton said.

For the temporary move to Honington, the RAPCON needed help from the 48th Communications Squadron and British Telecom for radio and telephone communications, weather information and a local area network for connectivity to the base.

"We successfully moved the air traffic control radar approach control operation to Honington because of the outstanding efforts of these people," said Capt. Kelly Koepsell, 48th OSS, airfield operations officer. "We appreciate the support of those people who helped us move."

Journey from the center of the earth at Jason VIII

By SSgt. Christopher J. Haug
Public Affairs

Witness gushing geysers, frozen glaciers, boiling mudpots, geothermal pools and erupting volcanoes all from Yellowstone National Park and Iceland at this year's Jason Project from April 28 - May 9 at the RAF Lakenheath High School.

The high school will serve as an interactive site for JASON '97. JASON is a program that uses satellite communication links to give audiences' viewers an opportunity to watch scientists carry out real scientific research at a study site.

Viewers will watch live transmissions that last approximately one hour and 15 minutes. They show at 2:45 p.m., 4:15 p.m., 5:45 p.m., 7:15 p.m. and 8:45 p.m. local time. Admission is free. Reservations are required. Call Faye Batey at (01638) 527220 or email faye_batey@odedodea.edu.

"Jason VIII brings the excitement of scientific discovery through the innovation of "Telepresence" – live satellite broadcast that follows a science expedition as it happens," said Faye Batey, DODDS project director.

"Using advanced "you-are-there" telecommunications with new technologies like video conferencing, the Internet and satellite communications, millions of students from the United States, United Kingdom, Bermuda, Mexico and Iceland will participate in the expedition by submitting questions and talking with the scientist."

Along with 25 other students from around the world, Paul Cline, from RAF Alconbury High School, will work on one of the six research teams studying geothermal areas and animal movements at Yellowstone.

The JASON project program — now in its eighth year — uses live broadcasts to show participants how each year's project develops on a daily basis. These live programs are beamed via satellite to more than 30 sites in North America and the United Kingdom. Previous broadcasts have taken place from the Mediterranean, Hawaii, the Galapagos Islands, Belize, the Baja Peninsula, the Great Lakes and the Florida Keys.

Besides the educational advantages it offers, JASON also offers participants a chance to watch scientists doing real field research. "It's about as close to actually being there and doing the work yourself, that an observer can get," Batey said.

Its unique perspective, educational theme, and high-tech support make JASON appealing to viewers of all ages, Batey said.

Although each day's programming follows a basic outline, each show is unique, since the program's format is "live."

"There is a progression as scientists discover things during their research over the two-week period," Batey said.

JASON offers viewers an opportunity to do more than just passively sit and watch a scripted, preset program. With JASON, viewers will see the action live on three screens — a large, movie screen which will show what's going on, and two smaller screens that show background information that explains in greater detail what's being shown on the main screen.

People can also witness the event via the Internet by tapping into http://www.jasonproject.org and the RAF Lakenheath Primary Interactive Network Site at http://www.dungeon.com/~faye/.